

Transcript

Screencast – Outreach to Preserve Airports

Produced and Narrated by Rich Stowell

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Imagine attending a public meeting about your airport.

One by one, people who have no direct connection to general aviation stand up and defend the airport because they've seen the impact its programs have had on their children's education.

Has this ever happened? Why couldn't this happen?

Unfortunately, it seems airports only make headlines whenever:

Pilots make mistakes;

And communities get fired up to close them.

Portraying general aviation in a positive light requires inreach and outreach.

INREACH involves services provided by and for the aviation community.

OUTREACH means "providing services to populations who might not otherwise have access to those services." In other words, the community-at-large.

In this screencast, I'll discuss the need for effective outreach as a way to preserve public-use airports.

Functional Fixedness is a cognitive bias that limits a person to using an object only in the way it is traditionally used.

Thinking that airports can only ever be places where pilots are trained, airplanes are stored, and fuel is sold, is a form of functional fixedness.

So too is the prevailing mindset that making more pilots is the only way to improve the state of general aviation.

But where have these fixations gotten us?

As this graph shows, the active pilot population has been declining for three decades.

27 years of ACE Academies across the U.S. have reached an estimated 340,000 participants.

25 years into the Recreational Pilot Certificate has resulted in 190 active Recreational Pilots.

24 years into the Young Eagles program has resulted in 2 million Young Eagles flown.

A decade into the Sport Pilot Certificate has resulted in just under 5,500 Sport Pilots.

And yet the steady decline in the active pilot population continues unabated.

Borrowing from a common question asked on the popular show Shark Tank, what has been the customer acquisition cost for all of this?

Now we have Third Class Medical Reform.

While a good thing, will it be general aviation's savior, or just a stopgap?

Only time will tell what effect it will have on the pilot population.

But what if we are depending on the wrong things to save general aviation?

What if we need to look at things differently?

I'll use the case of the Wright Brothers as an analogy.

The Wright Brothers saw the problem of human flight differently from everyone else:

They realized that without Balance and Control, flying machines would not be viable.

The Wrights also measured their results and compared them against predicted outcomes.

Because of this, they discovered the information everyone had been using was **WRONG**.

And on December 17th, 1903, the Wrights were able to fly under control at 34 miles per hour, on just 12 horsepower.

We enjoy the ability to fly today precisely because the Wright Brothers did not blindly follow what everyone else had been doing over and over again without success.

In the spirit of thinking differently, I will make a bold statement:

Saving general aviation, saving our airports, **IS NOT ABOUT MAKING MORE PILOTS!**

At least, not directly.

It's about **RELATIONSHIPS**. It's about positioning airports and airport businesses as valuable assets to their communities.

Here's a bit more perspective on the "just make more pilots" idea.

The blue line shows the annual number of active pilots in the U.S. since 1929.

The orange line shows the annual number of active prisoners.

Since 1990, more people in the U.S. have been sitting in jail than in aircraft cockpits.

And in 2008, more people in the U.S. practiced some form of paganism than practiced touch and go's.

This graph shows the number of active pilots as a percentage of the total U.S. population since 1929.

Pilots barely register. In fact, if we use this 100-dollar bill to represent the entire U.S. Population, active pilots would be pocket change, just 25 cents.

Active pilots have never been more than about 35 cents out of a \$100 bill.

This graph shows the decline in public-use landing facilities and airports since 1969.

Landing Facilities include Airports, Heliports, and Seaplane Bases.

1-in-4 of our public-use airports has closed.

From 1969 to 1980, the number of airports decreased 11 percent; yet the number of active pilots increased 15 percent.

Put another way, of all the airports lost since 1969, 41% of them closed during the same period when the number of active pilots was growing!

In fact, we reached our zenith of 827,000 active pilots in 1980.

Clearly more pilots do not translate into airport preservation.

A 2011 report by the Transportation Research Board concluded that airport closures are largely unrelated to:

- The historical number of active pilots.

- The number of general aviation hours flown.

- Or the number of active general aviation aircraft.

As the high-profile case of Santa Monica Airport illustrates:

- Preservation of airports must be a proactive effort.

- Waiting until an airport is on the chopping block is reactive, and usually too little too late.

An article about Santa Monica by Ben Sclair hit the nail squarely on the head:

“Had the city valued the airport more than a park or business option, we wouldn’t be having this discussion.”

Lack of perceived value is a top reason for the closure of public-use airports.

A purpose of the Idaho Airport Management Association is to promote understanding of the value of airports.

This should be the purpose of everyone in the aviation industry.

But when talking about value, we need to keep in mind the value to whom?

An airport’s value is the sum of its economic and social impacts.

Social impact is “A significant, positive change that addresses a pressing social challenge.”

It results from a deliberate set of activities with a goal around this definition.

When it comes to airport preservation, we cannot frame the issue in terms of the value to US in the aviation community.

It has to be the value to OTHERS in the community-at-large.

This is the WIIFM Principle.

We need to tailor the message to the audience.

Discussing the economic Impact might resonate with local politicians and businesses, but less so with the rest of the community.

For the broader community—those who attend public meetings about your airport—talking in terms of social impact might be more effective.

The pressing social challenge for communities across the country involves STEM education and workforce development.

So why not position airports as educational resources? Doing so would make the economic impact more meaningful, and vice versa.

NJ offers an interesting Case Study:

Since 1952, more than half of the state’s public-use airports have closed.

The state has the highest population density in the U.S., and the most people per airport.

In 2013, New Jersey had 207,000 residents per Public Use Airport, but only 209 pilots per airport.

Pilots are just one-tenth of one percent of the population in NJ.

A NJ report found the leading cause of friction between its airports and communities was not noise, but a lack of communication.

The report identified the need for education about the value of airports in the community.

With pilots representing a fraction of a percent of the total population, what non-traditional services can airports provide that might appeal to the remaining 99 percent of the population?

One proven way is to form lasting and beneficial partnerships with key stakeholders.

Local airports need to engage with Business, Academic, Industry, and Government Stakeholders.

One of the results of making this a collaborative effort is the creation of more advocates and active participants.

ADVOCATES may not have direct involvement with the airport, but have had positive experiences and recognize the airport's value as a community resource.

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS are those who become involved in the aviation industry directly, maybe as engineers, planners, controllers, mechanics, airport owner/operators, aviation business owners, and yes, maybe even as pilots.

Outreach efforts must be integrated to be effective.

They must provide multiple on ramps for people to join or rejoin the process.

We need to "get 'em early, and get 'em often."

One shot deals simply don't work.

To see how these concepts have been tested and applied with success at a small airport, download the paper "Effective Outreach: Preserving General Aviation by Putting the 'Public' in Public-Use Airports" [<http://AlexandriaField.com/Reports>].

Download a copy of the "Guidebook for the Preservation of Public Use Airports" as well [<http://AlexandriaField.com/Reports>].

Also, what will you do to tag your airport as a place that matters?

For more information as well as downloadable toolkits and signage, visit <https://SavingPlaces.org>.

May is preservation month – why not start a campaign to raise awareness about your airport?

The perpetual frontal assault to make more pilots has not worked. It's time for a flanking maneuver.

Working to position airports as educational resources instead just might be more effective at improving the state of general aviation.

The challenge is to think and act more broadly:

To improve community relations.

Explore alternative revenue streams for airport businesses that engage the community.

And show how airports can be valuable assets to their communities.

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